

"I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME. . .": JESUS'
TEACHING ON HOSPITALITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MATTHEW 25:31-46


BY

EMILY JEPTEPKENY CHOGE

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Approved:

Supervisor


Dr. Samuel Ngewa

Second Reader


Mrs. Margaret Sim

External Reader


Prof. Hannah W. Kinoti

July, 1997.

Emily Choge



Abstract

Hospitality was valued in ancient Israel and it was enshrined in the Mosaic legislation. In first century Judaism, it was continued positively in the institutions of the Sabbath meal, the Synagogue and the travelling pairs of teachers who depended on the hospitality of their students. Negatively, restrictions were introduced in the enforcement of purity or cleanness laws intended to exclude those who did not qualify. These rules were strictly observed by the Essenes and the Pharisees. However, Jesus demonstrated a very inclusive ministry both in his teaching and interactions. In his teaching couched in the apocalyptic imagery in Matt. 25:31-46, he shows that hospitality will be the mark of identification for those who will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom. The apocalyptic element shows that the teaching was given in the context of hardships and persecutions for these early Christians. In his interactions Jesus showed an open attitude to those who were left out of the covenant community, the Gentile Centurion and his servant (Matt. 8:5-13), the Canaanite woman and her daughter (Matt. 15:21-28), and the tax collector, Matthew and his friends (Matt. 9:9-13). The church in Africa today finds it difficult to practise hospitality because of Socio-economic hardships, growing insecurity, the influence of modernization and the lack of guidance due to the breakdown traditional values. Jesus' teaching can inform our situation because it arose out of a similar context.